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Report of the EC Seminar "State of Fish Stocks and Fisheries in European Waters", Brussels 17 September

Dear Colleagues,

On 17th September in Brussels the annual seminar on the state of stocks in the European seas was held. The Director, Mrs Lowri Evans, chaired the meeting which was based on the contributions provided by three experts: the first on the Atlantic – North Sea – Baltic, the second on the Mediterranean and Black Sea and the third on economic aspects.

Where the first contribution was concerned, the data provided by the expert from ICES demonstrated that the situation has generally improved for many stocks, with fishing mortality (F) close to or under that defined in the sustainability objectives (F MSY). This is not yet the case for all of the stocks, however it is true for a significant proportion, so much so that some experts have remarked that the old CFP was clearly not entirely inefficient, as has been suggested during the proposal of the new reform, which is now being approved.

The second contribution, relative to the Mediterranean, described the situation in much more negative terms, which can also be comprehended by viewing the website as already indicated by the Secretariat (the slides were prepared by the Chair of the STECF EWG MED Massimiliano Cardinale and Giacomo Chato Osio EC Joint Research Center).

The state of fishery resources in the Mediterranean was summarised as follows:

- Knowledge levels are developing rapidly;
- 94-95% of the stocks analysed proved to be over exploited in relation to the F MSY (these data are coherent with GFCM/SAC data and refer to 2011);
- To achieve the MSY it is necessary to reduce F by 45 – 51 %;
- Reducing F alone will not make achievement of MSY possible, it will also be necessary to increase gear selectivity;
- **THE REDUCTION IN FISHING EFFORT DETECTED HAS NOT LED CORRESPONDINGLY TO A DECREASE IN F**



On the basis of these findings, the contribution indicated the following immediate actions:

- Reduce F for all demersal species through catch/effort reduction;
- Introduce a TAC system for small pelagic species;
- Increase gear selectivity in order to approach the MSY;
- Develop robust coordination and collaboration between GFCM-SAC and SGMED, considering the stocks shared with third countries.

The need to develop integrated models to estimate M (natural mortality), multi-fleet data and selectivity models was also indicated (Chato Osio presented a model of *“Productivity and Susceptibility analysis”*, which was Australian in origin and defined the level of potential risk to which the stocks are exposed).

Much of the seminar was therefore dedicated to the critical situation in the Mediterranean and consequently to the important work that must be undertaken and the challenges involved, as frequently underlined by the Director Evans.

The meeting continued with the interventions of all the RAC representatives, who reacted and commented on the contributions provided by the experts. On behalf of RAC MED the following statements were made:

- Eight of the countries around the Mediterranean are now Member States, several fleets operate in the basin, it is a complex situation and the political instability that has, in recent years, affected countries to the south and east has not facilitated dialogue, collaboration and the observance of rules;
- Given the worrying situation of many stocks, as described by Mr M. Cardinale, it is necessary to assess possible solutions bearing in mind the complexity of fisheries in the area and the multi-specific nature of the fishery systems in use (above all for demersal resources). Many RAC MED members therefore believe that there should be an additional phase of financial support for the reduction of capacity (the definitive withdrawal of fishing vessels and therefore fleet reduction) this would be beneficial for the entire RAC MED area; further to this, it was noted that RAC MED members consider multi-annual management plans a key tool for the achievement of sustainability.
- It is necessary to realize that it is no longer possible to consider Mediterranean fisheries without taking the GFCM into account as the “Management Authority” in the area. A few months ago the GFCM issued the first recommendation with a management plan (small pelagics in the Adriatic – GSA 17 and 18 – which with the entry of Croatia in the EU has essentially become an EU basin), this recommendation will be applied from November if no Member State presents an appeal;
- An important and surprising concept emerged from the contribution presented: the “decoupling” of fishing effort and F. If fishing mortality does not diminish with a reduction in fishing effort then there is a problem that needs to be investigated and understood by all concerned. This situation would appear to be inexplicable, we need to reflect on the quality of the fishing effort reduction and the adequacy of the management plans that are already in place (which include a wide range of measures), it is necessary to measure the efficiency of these plans by comparing them to the evaluations carried out on the basis of data collection.



- It is important to understand whether these rather alarming data are relative to a period that is prior to the establishment of the management plans (which all began later than envisaged) or if they demonstrate the inefficiency of these same management plans;
- It is undeniable that there is much still to be understood and accomplished in the Mediterranean, one aspect to be tackled is illegal fisheries and not just in terms of IUU, this is a matter of small-scale illegality that is widespread and manifests itself in the daily habits of many fishers and fishing enterprises - this tendency illegal behaviour patterns must be abandoned by every single vessel.
- With reference to the contribution given by Mr Anderson, on the economic aspects, I noted that there were no data on employment, in the future it would therefore be preferable to include analyses of the performance of fishing enterprises and the employment dynamics in order to get a better picture of the impact and strategies of the CFP.

During the meeting the Commission was reminded of RAC procedures: the RACs are made up of several components, if any one component expresses an opinion on behalf of the RAC then in accordance with the rules this opinion must first be approved by a vote within the Executive Committee (providing the reasons for votes against the statement made and any abstentions). Therefore when asking RAC representatives to react to the contributions made during this meeting, any comments made that had not been endorsed in this way do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the RAC in question nor do they commit the RAC to take a particular stance on the issue in question.

In conclusion, I believe that we, as RAC MED, need to reflect seriously on the situation of Mediterranean resources (above all demersal resources) which, as described in the report by Mr Cardinale, appear to be very worrying indeed – especially given the apparent lack of influence of the reduction of fishing effort on F, about which several theories can be made none of which, however, is supported by reliable data. It is my belief that, in each Member State, accurate monitoring and analysis systems should be developed within the multiannual management plans, meaning the establishment of these systems up as well as ascertaining their efficiency. It is clear that, if the situation does not begin to show an inversion of this tendency, we can only expect the adoption of ever more severe measures by the EC. The reform to the CFP (and the EMFF) contemplates such measures in the presence of signs of crisis in any one stock or as a precautionary measure.

In the hope that this note can provide a small contribution to your reflections concerning the role of RAC Mediterranean and the work that is to be done, I offer my sincere greetings.

Giampaolo Buonfiglio
President

